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# Volume I: Introduction [Making Our Media: Global Initiatives Toward a Democratic Public Sphere (Vol. 1)]

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# VOLUME I

## Introduction

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These two volumes, *Making Our Media: Global Initiatives Toward a Democratic Public Sphere*, emerged from the transnational network called OURMedia/Nuestros Medios ([www.ourmedianet.org](http://www.ourmedianet.org)). Initiated in 2001 by long-time researchers Clemencia Rodríguez, Nick Couldry, and John Downing, the global network fosters an ongoing dialogue about what has variously been called *alternative, radical, alterative, autonomous, tactical, participatory, community, and citizens' media* (terms that we discuss below). OURMedia provides a meeting space to exchange, support, and strengthen these more inclusive and participatory media and to collaborate on larger efforts to democratize national and global media systems.

OURMedia reflects an important conjuncture. Grassroots media have grown from a set of small and isolated experiments to a complex of networks of participatory communications that are integral to local, national, and transnational projects of social change, as well as to campaigns to transform all aspects of information and communications systems. At the same time, there has been a burst of new research and publications from activists, academics, and policy advocates, which put alternative, community, and citizens' media at the center of their enquiry.

The structure of the two volumes reflects this complex praxis, between the construction of new communications models and spaces, the reform of existing media systems, and the creation of new research and theory. The first volume, *Creating New Communications Spaces*, features analyses of locally directed and managed radio, video, independent media centers (IMCs), and other web-based news

services from grassroots activists and academics from Chile, Colombia, Mexico, South Africa, Zimbabwe, India, Japan, Australia, the United States, Canada, Wales, and England. Anchoring their work in earlier studies of alternative and community media, and international development communications, this newer generation of researchers add interdisciplinary perspectives, often complicating earlier analyses with more nuanced and disjunctive accounts, to explain the rapidly changing nature of grassroots and citizens' communications. Their focus is on the democratization of the internal organization and production practices of grassroots media and the subsequent impact of these media on democratizing society.

The second volume, *National and Global Movements for Democratic Communication* addresses larger campaigns to reform the media. Authors from Korea, Peru, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Austria, Germany, and the United States examine national and transnational campaigns to involve citizens and grassroots movements in the democratization of information and communications policy and to extend social justice using communications media. The overriding goal of both volumes is to appraise some of the emergent designs these projects and campaigns provide for people around the world whose goal is the reconstruction of our media systems for the benefit of all.

Stepping back from the very concrete appraisals of local projects, this volume introduction provides some historical and theoretical context. We begin by revisiting some of the watershed historical moments in the global mediascape of the last 30 years, drawing the connection between the growing power and reach of giant global commercially dominated media networks and the emergence of grassroots communications networks based on the direction and capacities of social justice groups. Book-ending this period, we begin with the call for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) led by the nonaligned countries of the global south and end our review with a discussion of the communications dimensions of the global justice movement.

If the defeat of NWICO paralleled a hiatus in alternative and radical participatory media theory, the scope and scale of communications and media practice of the latter movement has led to a burst of new research from scholars, activists, and advocates. This most recent wave of scholarship, some of which is represented here, is notable for two reasons. First, rather than another set of new overreaching theories or disconnected case studies, the contributors adapt from an overlapping set of multidisciplinary and multiregional theoretical and analytical frames, providing a much needed contrapuntal conversation for this newly emerging field. Secondly, reflecting the composition of OURMedia itself, the contributors bridge the worlds of social movement activism, nongovernmental organization, and the university. The nexus of all three research approaches is a pragmatic investigation: what is working and not working, under what conditions and for whom, in the quotidian process of remaking communications practices and institutions for social transformation.

## INTERSECTIONS

We trace the roots of OURMedia to the 1970s and the movement for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) for three reasons. It was the first truly international forum to consider perspectives and evidence from a wide-ranging remit; many of the analyses of the structural inequities of global information and media systems, as well as their political and cultural ramifications, still seem prescient. Secondly, the NWICO movement underscored the importance of grassroots and alternative media in the democratization of communications and of societies. Finally, the contest over NWICO signaled the beginning of the current era of neoliberal globalization.

NWICO emerged in the 1970s when a coalition of national governments of the poorer countries of the south began to flex their new voting power at the United Nations (U.N.) to redress the structural inequities of the colonial system from which they were emerging (Carlsson, 2005: 197). In 1974, a group of 77 nations (G77) called for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) to reverse their structural dependency on the first-world powers and establish a fairer system of world trade and aid (Chakravarty & Sarikakis, 2006: 31). During the same period, they also began to call, with UNESCO, for a new international information order, which later became NWICO (31). After over a decade of extensive research, discussion, and debate, UNESCO published *One World, Many Voices*, or the MacBride Commission Report, named after the Chair, Sean MacBride (International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, 1980).

The Commission condemned the North-South inequities in media and information systems, which, they argued, had been designed to serve the interests of the Western military powers and transnational corporations. They underscored the “constraints imposed by commercialization, pressures from advertisers and concentration of media ownership” (Thussu, 2000: 46). The resultant asymmetry in news and information flows had a serious negative “impact on national identity, cultural integrity and political and economic sovereignty,” a critique shared by both poorer countries and richer ones such as France, Finland, and Canada (Ó Siochrú, Girard, & Mahan, 2002: 77). Perhaps the most innovative recommendation was the recognition they gave to the potential of radical, community, and trade union media to act as a counterbalance to the top-down information generation of communication monopolies, with their openness to horizontal communication among a multiplicity of participants (46).

The MacBride Report represented a greater international consensus on a common framework, justification, and set of remedies than ever before or since (Ó Siochrú, Girard, & Mahan, 2002: 78). However, the window of political opportunity for the NWICO movement, and for the wider movement for global economic and political equity, was short-lived. The U.S. and U.K. Governments, supported by the corporate commercial media, fiercely disagreed with the Report, arguing that any measures to limit media corporations or journalists

amounted to state censorship. Unable to sway the other national representatives, in 1983, the U.S. Government withdrew from UNESCO, followed soon after by the U.K. and Singapore Governments.

Weakened by the loss of a quarter of its budget, and stymied by internal and external dissension, UNESCO never again supported any direct confrontation with the United States. Operationally it continued to support a redress of the skewed communications flows by building capacity in poorer countries via local radio, video, and Internet projects and news agencies; and training and exchanges for journalists and researchers (Ó Siochrú, Girard, & Mahan, 2002: 79-80). However, in the late 1990s, when UNESCO again convened discussions about international governance issues with 140 countries in the U.N. World Commission on Culture and Development, they were careful to delete or weaken any controversial recommendations (81).

The NWICO Movement was also constrained by its own lack of vision and internal inconsistencies. The movement's credibility suffered as many national leaders, who called for the democratization of multilateral institutions on the world stage, brutally repressed movements for economic and cultural rights at home and enabled local political and corporate elites to dominate communication. In retrospect, perhaps their greatest limitation was their strategy; their challenge to the neocolonial powers was based on shoring up weaker national governments in the interstate system (Chakravarty & Sarikakis, 2006: 32). The main lesson of NWICO, according to Ó Siochrú, Girard, and Mahan, was that "the way forward would have to be through the democratization of media and communications, rather than through state- or industry-led efforts" (2002: 79). This strategic shift, in which civil society took the leading role in developing alternative media projects and models of communications, defines the groups and movements in both volumes.

## THE NEW MEDIASCAPES

The NWICO debate took place on the cusp of a seismic shift in global political governance, in which communications played a major role. During the late 1970s, many Western governments began to adopt market-based regulatory frameworks. The Reagan and Thatcher administrations were the most vociferous advocates of what is now called neoliberalism, or the Washington agenda (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 86). In 1983, when the U.S. Government exited the multilateral politicized fora of the U.N. and UNESCO, they argued that they needed instead to ensure the global competitiveness of their own capitalist industries, including the information and media industries, which are so critical to the U.S. economy.<sup>1</sup> Domestically, the U.S. Government called for the unfettering of these industries through the privatization of public communication systems and the removal of rules governing the ownership structure and behavior of media cor-

porations (Ó Siochrú, Girard, & Mahan, 2002: 27). Internationally, the U.S. Government lobbied for the promotion of their own information and entertainment industries, combining calls for corporate property rights, liberalization of trade rules, and the harmonization of telecommunications regulatory policy (Calabrese, 2004: 5) at the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank (WB), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), with bilateral (free) trade agreements with weaker countries.

National governments around the world followed suit, privatizing or severely cutting back public broadcasting and telecommunications systems and dropping most values of universality and public service within infrastructure planning and content review, as well as access to telecommunications and production resources (Miège, 2004: 189). A decade of what is more accurately called 're-regulation' substantially changed the balance of forces. National governments were by no means eclipsed; rather media and other corporations secured prominent positions in the framing of laws and policies to the detriment of citizens everywhere, as well as to smaller media and cultural production companies and national governments.

After an unprecedented wave of mergers and acquisitions of old and new media industries, a handful of giant U.S., Japanese, and European transnational conglomerates emerged as the principal owners of a complex interdependent global system. Much of the production of music, film, news, and information services was outsourced to regional corporations, or more flexible clusters of smaller creative companies. Nevertheless, the decentralization of production did not change the overall patterns of hyper-market-driven and industrially produced media (Miège, 2004: 89). The core Northern industries continued to provide the templates for production and to control global sales and advertising markets, optimizing strategic alliances on specific projects to produce the constantly changing content demanded by a multiple of audiences around the world (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 176).

The result was a significant realignment of the media and information ecology. There was a decisive shift, as James Deane notes, from "government control to private (and to a much less extent, community) ownership and control of media" (2005:179). The upsurge of commercial and community radio, and also of information and communications technologies (ICTs) offering much more dynamic interactive content, initially benefited many regions and populations (Deane, 2005: 180-181). However, the imbalance in global news and cultural programming, first cited by the MacBride Report, continues; most news perspectives are still framed by Northern-based news providers (185), and Hollywood images still dominate the majority of the world's screens. In addition, the initial upsurge of local media outlets quickly shrank as competition intensified, with the result that content is shaped much more by the "demands of advertisers and sponsors" who tend to target young, male, affluent consumers in urban centers the world over (Deane, 2005: 182). Reporting, discussion, and deliberation of local and

regional public issues, particularly of poverty and social injustice, education, and healthcare are increasingly left out (183). The majority of the world, and especially those marginalized in rural areas and by poverty, literacy, patriarchal, racial, and caste oppression, are largely excluded from basic media access, let alone the interactive and participatory possibilities of expression and dialogue.

## THE THIRD SECTOR

If the shift to neoliberalism drastically skewed global communication, it also created conditions of radical possibility (Uzelman, 2002: 77-80). Media activists have appropriated some of the technologies first designed by corporate and military apparatuses and reshaped them to meet local information and communication needs around the world. As the MacBride Report promised, they also provided living examples of new forms of democratic communication. Although marginal in many respects, their emerging design patterns turn the neoliberal blueprint of communications on its head and its architecture inside out.

If the commercial media is tilted towards a Northern axis of U.S. English-language production centers in Hollywood and New York, Latin America has been the epicenter for much participatory communications activity, as the high number of contributions to these two volumes attest. Jesús Martín-Barbero points out that Latin American scholars were key drafters of the original NWICO proposal, drawing on the region's experiences of national policy work and alternative communications (Communication Initiative, 1999). Many of the projects documented in this volume were inspired by Latin American examples, such as the Bolivian miners' radio, whose 60-year run modeled local participation and governance, as well as courage in the face of military and government repression. Since then, the lessons of Latin American *radio popular* have become even more important, as radio has become the world's most significant medium, especially for marginalized groups in both rural and metropolitan areas.

This emphasis on the deep involvement of marginalized communities is integral to community radio and the other media projects described in this volume. It is distinct from the user-generation of Web 2.0, which, while still in development, has already revealed a dangerous tilt towards an intense level of surveillance and data-mining of participants by corporate brands (Chester, 2006). Instead, the meaning and practice of participation presented here is more extensive, based in collective design, decision making, creative interchange and governance, at all stages of the production and circulation of meaning, up to and including the ownership and self-government of the media outlet.

In addition to providing some of the earliest models for local projects, Latin Americans were leaders in creating alternative kinds of global networks. Working together with Canadian, U.S., and European media activists in the 1980s, they built networks of video and community radio producers. Beginning in 1987,

Latin American video producers met annually to share information on production, distribution, training, and technology, as well as national and regional communications policies, inspiring similar meetings in other regions (Ambrosi, 1991: 17). After meetings in Canada and Latin America, community radio producers formed the World Association of Community Radio (AMARC, by its French acronym). Unlike the commercial media networks, based on central hubs, AMARC is a network of networks, linking 3,000 projects in 106 countries, including a wide variety of stations and content combines.<sup>2</sup> Rather than a market-based industrial network, replicating a small number of advertising or sponsor-driven production routines and programming genres, AMARC recognizes a diversity of forms, including 'community radio,' 'rural radio,' 'participatory radio,' 'free radio,' 'alternative radio,' 'radio popular,' 'educational radio' and 'indigenous radio.'

The Latin American contribution of NWICO, *radio popular*, and alternative media networks arose partly out of necessity. For example, during the 1980s, when Latin America suffered severely from the combined ravages of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed by the World Bank and IMF, and of war, social movements turned to local and national alternative media to circulate information and debate, as Bresnahan documents in this volume. Recognizing how the SAPs and other neoliberal policies were decided at the global level, Latin American and other communicators formed a computer-linked network of NGOs and other organizations involved in human and environmental rights, the rights of labor, and women's rights. This network eventually became the Association of Progressive Communicators (APC) (Murphy, 2002).

This convergence of networks of social movements and communications was amplified on January 1, 1994, when the Zapatista National Liberation Army emerged from the Lacandón jungle to protest the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Martinez-Torres, 2001). A guerilla movement unlike any of its Latin American predecessors, the Zapatistas promoted an inclusive strategy that was not focused on taking state power (Martinez-Torres, 2001: 348). Much like the Mapuche communicators in Chile, whom Salazar documents, the Zapatistas "gave indigenosity new importance, even while re-inventing its meaning" (348). Their playful use of images, sounds, and narratives consciously appealed to the participation of the poor and middle classes of Mexico. Via face-to-face *encuentros*, publications, and the Internet, they also circulated their experiences and analyses to allies around the world (Russell, 2001: 359-360). The combination of creative and tactical uses of communications, emphasizing local and direct self-representation, contrasted with the relentless and anonymous messages of corporate globalization and became a source of inspiration for media activists from around the world (Herndon, 2003).

In 1999, this new conceptualization of globally networked participatory communications took another leap forward, when 80,000 antiglobal capitalism activists convened in Seattle to resist the neoliberal mandates of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Kidd, 2004: 334). A coalition of social justice orga-



nizers, media activists, and open-source computer designers drew from the experience of the Zapatistas, other tactical media,<sup>3</sup> and their own experience in alternative media projects of micro and community radio, independent video, and computer networks to create the first Independent Media Center (IMC) (Halleck, 2002). Their highly collaborative planning and production process and their goal of disseminating news as widely as possible to activists around the world quickly became a global network of exchange, articulation, and consensus building about alternatives to corporate globalization (Downing, 2003; Kidd, 2003b). The IMC has been an influential pioneer of many collaborative news production practices, and we include several evaluations in this volume (Brooten & Hadl, Royce & Martin, Skinner et al., Anderson).

## THE EMERGING FIELD

In the last decade there has been a resurgence of research and writing about alternative media, in large part spurred by a critical mass of projects around the world and the recognition of their role in processes of social change. In contrast to the homogenization of content and standardization of program genres and modes of production, marketing, and audience research of the dominant commercial and state-owned media, the grassroots media sector is characterized by heterogeneity, multiple modes of genre, address, and a plethora of production models. Trying to keep up with the politics, aesthetics, technologies, and communication philosophies of these newer media projects, researchers and advocates have begun a search for different analytical, theoretical, and methodological proposals to investigate them.<sup>4</sup>

The two volumes of *Making Our Media* reflect this growth in the scope and scale of communications projects and of the research. The authors develop more nuanced, critical assessments of the projects, and re-assess earlier conceptualizations and definitions of the interrelated processes of communications, democratization, and social change. The work also reflects a deepening of the field, as several of the projects bridge approaches to research drawn from the university academy, the policy or advocacy realm, with media production and social justice practice. None of these theoretical or methodological developments are uniform or without tension, as we describe below.

## OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

*Making Our Media: Volume One* is divided into four sections with introductory essays providing the context for key themes and issues. The first section, *Pushing Theoretical Boundaries* deals, as Nick Couldry writes in his introduction, with questions of definitions. “What do we call what we study?” and “What aspects of

the practice do we give the greatest priority?" This second generation of researchers draws from the literature of the field, either deepening the theorization with the richness of particular places, peoples, and media, or creating new syntheses with the adaptation of theory from other disciplines or research practices. Critiquing earlier conceptualizations of 'community' radio, Tanja Bosch instead examines Bush Radio in South Africa through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome, an underground grasslike tuber with multiple entry points and routes. Her mapping of the station's multiple, fluid, and disjunctive patterns of impact on producers, other media, and audiences inaugurates more complex ways to think of evaluation than the usual—and not very helpful—audience analyses.

Juan Francisco Salazar documents the media of the Mapuche people in Chile, which has been historically excluded from the dominant commercial media and national government policy frameworks and from the alternative or citizens' media of nonindigenous groups. Building his argument from the work of several theorists, including Foucault, Nancy Fraser, Rafael Roncagliolo, Guillermo de la Peña, and Clemencia Rodríguez, Salazar argues that Mapuche media create new insurrectionary imaginaries as part of a fluid counter-public sphere, intervening in public discussions of land, resources and communications within Mapuche communities, the Chilean and Argentinean nation states, and among the wider indigenous movement throughout Latin America.

Chris Anderson compares three online participatory journalism sites: Wikipedia, the Northwest Voice in Bakersfield, California, and U.K. Indymedia. He reviews how these new practices of citizens' journalism are changing notions of reporting, objectivity, and the nature of democratic participation. He is less sanguine about whether citizens' journalism will result in any substantial institutional change in journalism, or larger political and economic structures of society, absent strong connections with off-line geographic communities and/or larger political movements.

The second section, *Communication for Social Change Projects*, reviews participatory communications projects with just those dimensions. The three studies examine media based in poor, rural communities in Zimbabwe, India, and Colombia respectively, and within larger projects of social change. Working within the legacy of development communications, they utilize global feminist and other kinds of scholarship to analyze the collective processes of reconstructing local knowledges and histories, analyzing common problems, and empowering themselves and their communities. They also all deal with the value of popular participatory media in promoting dialogue among highly conflicted populations, divided by the legacies of violence from civil war, caste, class and gender oppression.

The third section is especially concerned with interrogating questions of process. As Ellie Rennie suggests in her section introduction, the guiding thread to these projects based in the richer countries is "Why can't it work better?" The research team of Meadows, Forde, Ewart, and Foxwell examine the relationship

between producers and audiences in the rapidly growing Australian community radio sector, which has stepped up to provide basic communications spaces for communities defined by locale and/or cultural identification, encouraging dialogue between diverse publics and ultimately affecting the larger public sphere.

The other three chapters in this section deal with the global Indymedia network (IMC). Since beginning in Seattle in 1999, the IMC Network has grown to over 150 sites, replicated by activists covering social justice issues around the world. The IMC pioneered many of the technologies and softwares that are now part of the user-generated menu of Web 2.0, starting with a networked system that allows anyone with access to the Web to upload multimedia content. However, the real innovation of the IMC was its DNA of participatory democracy, which informed every aspect of the Network, from the consensus-based forms of decision making of each autonomous local site, special production team, and technical crew.

This rapid growth was not without growing pains, many of which are dissected in the three chapters in this section. In the face of criticism and waning activities in the Canadian IMCs, the research team of Skinner, Uzelman, Langlois, and Dubois examined three different city sites to assess the viability of the IMCs as sites of resistance to dominant forms of media and political power. Lisa Brooten and Gabriele Hadl interviewed participants from several different sites and analyzed website content and internal newswlists to assess the status of gender dynamics in content production, governance, and conflict resolution. Janet Jones and Martin Royston interrogated power relations within the U.K. IMC. Applying Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere, they tested the goals of consensus-based democratic participation in content generation and governance with the realities of existing on- and offline social and technological elites and computer protocols. As of 2007 and this writing, it remains to be seen how the IMC Network will respond to these internal challenges and to the rapid growth of other models of participant-driven news networks.

As John Downing points out in his Introduction to the last section, *Our Media and the State*, these accounts of indigenous community radio in Mexico, alternative media in Chile, and Welsh digital storytelling within the BBC deal with the "everyday low-intensity contestation of established power." Government media systems have sometimes supported the cultural expression of ordinary people, partly because it is a safer alternative than the extension of political power. Jennifer Kidd asks whether the BBC is less interested in popular expression than in incorporation, and Castells Talens describes how some Mexican indigenous stations received more support during the height of the Zapatista movement in the 1990s, when government leaders preferred their 'multiculturalist' emphasis to the political threat of the Zapatistas. As a contrasting case, Bresnahan reveals both the unexpected openings provided by the Catholic Church in Chile during the Pinochet period and the unexpected closings during the so-called period of democratization, when the imposition of neoliberal communications policies marginalized and/or eliminated some forms of alternative media.

## METHODS

The research optics and language of this volume reveal some of the tensions of the multisectoral alliance that is OURMedia. Most authors are not solely interested in these topics as academic research, but combine roles as producers/participants, participant/researchers, or researcher/advocates. Clemencia Rodríguez describes a stance common to many of the contributors, in which “academic research should be *at the service of praxis*” (398) with the knowledge produced usable by the projects themselves.

The process of ‘collective construction of knowledge,’ common to earlier feminist and participatory action research approaches, has been enriched with inventive mixes of qualitative methods. Several employ participatory and ethnographic observation and in-depth interviews. Many contributors also provided more opportunities for collaboration and reflection from participants via video documentaries (Salazar, Matewa), radio programs (Bosch), Internet wikis (Brooten and Hadl), memory workshops (Rodríguez), and virtual ethnographies (Royston and Martin). These approaches were supplemented with institutional policy research, textual analysis (Salazar, Bresnahan, Brooten and Hadl, Bosch), and audience research using focus groups (Pavarala and Malik) and quantitative surveys (Meadows et al.). As a result, the voices, experiences, and perspectives of the participants are much more in the foreground, and several of the chapters incorporate a multiperspectival narrative form.

Most of the chapters also met the criticism, often dealt to social change communications research, of ‘silo’ thinking, or being too inward, or singularly focused. Instead, they took a variety of comparative approaches. Several studies are national in scope, including Pavarala and Malik, Castells Talens, Skinner et al., and Meadows et al.; and Matewa and Rodríguez compared projects in subnational regions. Anderson compared three different kinds of participatory journalism sites, and Salazar assessed different kinds of Mapuche media. Brooten and Hadl, Pavarala and Malik, and Matewa all employ gender lenses across several projects. The comparative approaches all effectively act to reveal important dimensions and dynamics across each set of practices.

## NAMING

Terminology, as Nick Couldry discusses in his Introduction to Section 1, is another of the key dimensions of this field of research. The terms are multiple, as a recent study by Ferron outlines.<sup>5</sup> This wide variety is in part due to the truly global scope of the field, and the very different historical and political paradigms in which these media and the research about them have developed. The relentless focus on naming is perhaps also indicative of the relative isolation and

underdevelopment of the field and the multitude of alternative visions and practices it has to cover.

This volume contributes to this process of defining the field, providing a critique of three of the foundational terms, 'development communications,' 'community media,' and 'alternative media,' and suggesting new formulations in light of new experiences and new analyses. Bosch, Matewa, Pavarala and Malik, and Rodríguez are uniformly critical of the early notions of 'development communications' emanating from UNESCO and other international development agencies. Bosch notes the persuasion bias inherited from Western models of 'propaganda' and Matewa, and Pavarala and Malik critique the lack of foregrounding of women as active agents of change. All revise earlier definitions of 'participatory communications,' and argue instead for more collective decision making of all stakeholders in order to ensure the inclusive and interactive nature of the production process. In addition, Bosch, Pavarala and Malik argue for ownership of media by participants.

Tanja Bosch also interrogates the notion of 'community,' a foundational concept of her own Bush Radio in South Africa, and of the Australian, Mexican, and Indian community radio projects described elsewhere in the volume. Drawing from feminist and poststructural critics, she cautions against the invocation of 'community,' which can reinforce static identities and exclusionary boundaries, a nostalgic return to a nonexistent past, or acceptance of a permanent lower status in relation to state or commercial media. She utilizes Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the rhizome to theorize about the multiple and more contingent connections between people, ideas, and culture that constitute Bush Radio and many other grassroots radio stations.

'Alternative media' is also unpacked. Several authors use the term to distinguish between media produced by collectives and communities for purposes of social change and media driven by state or corporate interests. However, most of the authors find the term limiting, and either use it in combination with other terms or introduce new ones. Juan Salazar uses 'alterative media,' coined by Peruvian scholar Rafael Roncagliolo, to highlight the power of these media to alter the social world. Skinner, Uzelman, Langlois, and Dubois argue that 'alternative' media only concentrate on the outcomes of counter-information or counter-discourses within mainstream media, to the detriment of formative processes of making media. Instead, they proffer the term 'autonomous media' to signify radical changes in the content produced and in the use of more participatory and dialogic processes of production (Uzelman, 2002: 85).

Many of the volume contributors follow Clemencia Rodríguez (2001), who argued that 'alternative media' implies a reactive relationship with dominant media and a corresponding acceptance of a lesser status. Coining 'citizens' media,' she redirected the analysis away from the comparison with mass, commercial media, to focus instead on the cultural and social power processes triggered when local communities appropriate ICTs. Several of the contributors (Castells Talens, Meadows et al., Salazar, Bosch) adopt 'citizens' media' to

describe the complex internal and external dynamics of local social and political communications.

More recently, the term ‘citizens’ media’ itself has been perceived as problematic. On one hand—and although as defined by Rodríguez the term is far from liberal understandings of citizenship—the term cannot escape its connotation of inclusion and exclusion based on the legal status of the citizen, a status that is systematically denied to millions because of their nationality, work and health status, or sexual orientation. On the other hand, as recently articulated by Thomas (2007), citizenship as defined by liberal democratic theory—as a birthright and not in Rodríguez’ definition as everyday political action—cannot be easily dismissed “for in its implementation lies security for millions of people” (37) in the global South.

More important than reaching a consensual definition is the process of naming in which important issues and relationships are highlighted and clarified by academics, producers, activists, and artists. Ultimately this sharing of issues, questions, goals, and meanings help establish the parameters and contours of the field.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In an earlier two-volume collection about radical media, Armand Mattelart wrote about the challenges of documentation:

[T]his slow, collective and spontaneous accumulation of everything a social group did ... is scattered with long public silences, blanks in the soundtrack. Periods of advance and periods of withdrawal ... the difficulty of formalizing experiences of struggle, to reflect together on what has happened to the group, sometimes because of the impossibility of doing so, other times because of a latent desire for amnesia as a defense mechanism against failures and errors. ... (Mattelart & Siegelau, 1983: 18-19)

This volume, with its cross-regional scope, is beginning to fill in some of the ‘blanks in the soundtracks’ of earlier grassroots media history. Although the contributors draw insights across disciplines of communications, social movements, technology studies, women’s and indigenous studies, among others, they employ enough similarity in their frameworks to further a common conversation. Rather than designing representative samples allowing for generalizable conclusions, the chapters in this volume take a more anthropological approach. Based on thick descriptions and ethnographic evidence of subtle changes in media use, culture, and power, the volume’s authors theorize key elements, processes, structures, and relationships. Although this knowledge is not easily transferred to other media initiatives with very different contexts, it does provide more sophisticated theoretical and analytical understandings of community and alternative media. It is

our hope that these pioneering theoretical perspectives provide new lenses with which to review other alternative and community media projects.

Many of the authors pivot their analysis around the concept of the 'public sphere,' if albeit, two updated versions. Following Nancy Fraser (1992), they describe the interconnection of plural sets of spheres, distinguished between dominant and counter-public spheres, in which marginalized groups develop their own communications spaces to articulate social and political needs and formulate positions and remedies. Individuals operate as members of multiple and overlapping spheres. For example, Pavarala and Malik's account of grass-roots women radio producers in rural India shows the fluid interchange of different subject positions and discourses as they circle outwards from membership in rural women's circles, dalit families, and rural villages, to present a multiple of subtle challenges to patriarchy, casteism, and local and national political elites.

Several contributors also draw on John Downey and Natalie Fenton (2003), who in line with Habermas' more recent writings argue that the contemporary era combines conditions of global dominance of multimedia conglomerates with the growth of decentralized, localized forms of citizen-responsive media and of media used by NGOs or civil society (188). Civil society groups may be able to exploit periodic crises for the enhancement of political mobilization and participation, or they may be more subject to fragmentation and polarization (189).

Both ends of this continuum are described in the volume. In Australia, the number of community radio stations has surpassed those of commercial radio. If this growth is partly due to the mobilization of what Meadows et al. call 'communities of interest,' it has also resulted from the evacuation of commercial and state media from rural areas and from the provision of communications services for indigenous peoples and 'multicultural' groups, due to market-friendly policy decisions. In contrast, in Chile, the market liberalism policies of the *Concertación* government led to a greater decline of alternative media than under the more repressive state controls of the Pinochet regime. In the more competitive market climate, left-oriented media were explicitly refused funding by both commercial and state advertisers. Moreover, in some cases, legalization hindered rather than helped many of the activist community radio stations, which were turned down for licenses. The Mexican experience of state-supported indigenous radio further complicates the picture. The neoliberal policies of decentralization and austerity led to an increase in the number of radio stations, as well as cuts in resources and paid staff. However, as Castells Talens explains, some indigenous communities were able to broker more power when decentralization increased their relative remove from the power elite in the capital city of Mexico, and simultaneously, the successful mobilization of the Zapatista movement increased the overall currency of indigenous languages and traditional knowledges.

Both studies of indigenous media highlight another debate within the public sphere and social movement literature. Is the goal of these communications projects, and of the larger campaigns for social change of which they are a part, more

to do with cultural struggles related to “the recognition of the distinctive perspectives of ethnic, national, religious, and sexual minorities” or political claims for a “more just distribution of resources and wealth” (Fraser, 2005: 445)? Salazar’s and Castells Talens’ accounts challenge this false binary (Phillips, 2003), as they demonstrate the interconnection of recognition and redistribution struggles and of the related dimensions of ‘representation’ and ‘rights’ (Sreberny, 2005). The negotiation of Mexican indigenous peoples for recognition of ‘indigenous self-expression’ and for the rights and redistribution inherent in expressions of ‘indigenous nationalism’ (301) are both political and cultural. In Chile, the Mapuche media constructed new cultural imaginaries for Mapuche counter-publics and also created spaces in the dominant public sphere for political claims for resources and the consolidation of the Mapuche historical territories.

The volume does not provide any definitive answers to these larger questions of the relationship between alternative media, counter- and dominant public spheres, representation, and social change. However, the documentation of very particular contexts, across medium, genre, and time, provides comparative details about the ways that these media do contribute to a ‘multiplication of forces’ to further social change (Downey & Fenton, 2003: 194).

## INTERNAL DEMOCRACY

The contributors to this volume are also especially interested in questions of internal democracy within media. They draw on a combination of traditions, whose links between media structure, process, product, and social change long predate the ‘discovery’ of audience participation and collaboration of Web 2.0. Several of the studies build on alternative media literature, which highlighted the “emancipatory possibilities of organizational and technological innovation in the media” (Hesmondhalgh, 2000: 18). Others develop feminist critiques of structures, which limit women in “access to resources and in the development of collective, consensus-based and nonhierarchical organizational structures” (Brooten & Hadl, this volume, p. 207). Still others draw from the turn to participatory communications within international development and its attention to human-centered and not media-centered processes, “channeled through the collective decision-making of all stakeholders” (Bosch, this volume).

The contributors highlight the questions these new media pose to the structure, process, and content of state-run and corporate commercial media. In particular, the emphasis on the direct representation of multiple voices and locales challenges the point-to-mass media hierarchy. The centering of counter-publics contrasts with the mainstream media’s marginalization of these populations and perspectives. Their participatory media routines, which combine modes of address, present very different kinds of truth telling than the mainstream news routine of ‘two points of view’ representing the dominant political and corporate authorities.



If a recurrent theme is that the circulation of these new messages contest the dominant discourses and should be seen as political acts (Bosch, this volume), these analyses go much further than those of previous alternative media accounts. Uzelman writes that current practices not only separate themselves “from the logics of command and accumulation” of commercial and state media (in Skinner, this volume, p. 186), but also from the single-minded attention precursor groups gave to producing counter-information. In a parallel argument, Rodríguez underscores how the attention to process and form marks a turning point away from the reactivity of earlier left media practices.

Most celebrated among these ground-breaking participatory practices have been the open news wires of the IMC, which in 1999 first allowed contributors from anywhere within access of an Internet site to post text, audio, or video content.<sup>6</sup> However, the volume also provides details about the participatory practices of precursor media such as community radio and video. What is now called ‘crowd sourcing,’ for example, is a core activity of many groups, who as Pavarala and Malik, and Matewa describe, systematically draw programming content from local community organizations and generate popular dramatic plots and casts from audiences of rural poor.

However, if the contributors describe many ‘best practices,’ they are also bracingly reflexive about the difficulties of operationalizing internal media democracy. The projects are often inherently precarious, caught between the power of the state to nullify their operations or put them out of existence and smothering competition in the marketplace. The nagging questions of how counter-publics, expressly committed to democratization, resolve power differences based on class and cultural power, race/ethnicity, and gender is taken up in many different ways. Several contributors undertake microscopic examinations in order to unveil subtle processes by which the new participatory practices and the technologies themselves can reify power hierarchies, inclusions and exclusions, centers and peripheries. They remind us that even the most celebrated uses of ICTs—such as Indymedia, for example—need to be scrutinized and updated so that dynamics of oppression, silencing, and exclusion do not creep in and settle.

They also challenge some of the most hard-held liberal notions of ‘information as power.’ For example, Brooten and Hadl note that the idealization of ‘free expression’ in the IMC is not necessarily liberatory, if used to mask continuing forms of social dominance such as sexism and patriarchy. In southern India, a staff member wonders whether community radio can ever resolve the real problems for the rural poor, noting that empowerment is often limited to those most closely involved, with the most marginalized unable to participate because of their obligation to work long hours elsewhere.

The volume stands in stark contrast to the latest round of techno-utopianism of Web 2.0, with its lack of attention to the realities of global inequalities of power and structure. In his review of three on-line participatory journalism sites, Chris Anderson asks whether the new sites lead to ‘concrete radical change . . .’

within journalism or the 'larger political and economic structures,' or whether they instead promote 'hyperlocal,' nonradical approaches, which are easily reincorporated by the commercial media against which they were rebelling.

Overall, the volume assembles a set of dynamic pictures of the ongoing practices of participatory communications. The analysis, with its deep roots in specific contexts, extends well beyond the idealization of individual 'expression' for wealthy young, consumers in urban technological hot spots, to instead probe how participatory communications is and is not working for a cross-section of the world's majorities. These projects are not only a breeding ground for new kinds of social justice-oriented content, but prefigure new modes and genres of more inclusive production. As Juan Francisco Salazar suggests, these mediated communications processes are "imperfect media" (2004), sometimes used, and sometimes abused, in the larger processes of social, cultural and political change. Continuous research and evaluation of these practical experiments will help to redirect their action towards the elusive horizon of social justice for all.

## NOTES

1. This was by no means the first time the U.S. Government had supported the global expansion of U.S. media; in the 1920s, the U.S. State Department worked with Hollywood to guarantee global market dominance (Trumbour, 2002).
2. AMARC facilitates organizational links between individual stations, among regions, and globally as well as via a women's network, the Pulsar news syndication service, and other regular content-oriented campaigns.
3. Korean and Filipino media activists also participated in the demonstrations in Seattle (Kidd, 2004: 333). During the financial crisis in 1997, South Korean labor and other social movement activists simultaneously broadcast their demonstrations against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in several cities and opened the first web-based interactive news service, Jinbonet. Their work followed several other important tactical media campaigns against authoritarian states. In 1989, the year the Berlin Wall came down, prodemocracy activists in Czechoslovakia transferred foreign news coverage of their antigovernment demonstrations to videotape and circulated them as widely as possible (Jones, 1994: 147); and activists in Hong Kong used fax machines to "send messages of support along with uncensored news from the outside world" to those demonstrating in Tienanmen Square (Jones, 1994: 152). In 1992, the Thai activists of the 'cellular phone revolution' used both faxes and cell phones to demonstrate against the corrupt and autocratic military regime (153). Attempting to avoid harassment and government censorship during the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, the radio producers of B-92 in Belgrade, Serbia established a web link in 1996 with XS4ALL in Amsterdam. This allowed them to continue sending out information via email news bulletins or a Real Audio stream (Markovic, 2000).
4. Published almost simultaneously, the works of John Downing, with Tamara Villareal Ford, Gèneve Gil and Laura Stein (2001), Gumucio-Dagrón (2001b), Clemencia Rodríguez (2001) and Chris Atton (2002) explored and applied theoretical frameworks

- that ranged from Adorno, Martín Barbero, and Freire (Downing), to Foucault, Williams, Bakhtin, Spivak (Atton) and Mouffe and McClure (Rodríguez). See also works on community media, including Nick Jankowski and Ole Prehn's edited volume (2002), Andrés Geerts, Victor Van Oeyen and Claudia Villamayor's study of community radio in Latin America (2004), the transnational works of Kevin Howley (2005); and Ellie Rennie (2006). In addition, see the edited collections of Laura Stein, Bernadette Barker-Plummer and Dorothy Kidd (1999), Kidd and Barker-Plummer (2001), Nick Couldry and James Curran (2003), Andy Opel and Donnalyn Pompper (2003), and Chris Atton and Nick Couldry (2003). For perspectives on radical alternative media, see Dee Dee Halleck (2002), Dorothy Kidd's work on the IMC (2003a, 2003b, 2004), Mitzi Waltz (2005) and Andrea Langlois and Frédéric Dubois' edited volume (2005). For scholarship about indigenous media, see Morris and Meadows (2001), Molnar and Meadows (2001), Donald Browne (2005), Lorna Roth (2005), Faye Ginsburg (2002), Juan Francisco Salazar (2007, 2004, 2003, 2002), and Rodríguez and El-Gazi (2007).
5. Recently Ferron (2007) inventoried the following terms: alternative (Atton, 1999, 2002), radical (Downing et al., 2001), citizens' (Rodríguez, 2001), marginal (Trejo, 1980; Zapata, 1989), participatory (Alfaro Moreno, 2004), counter-information (Cassigoli, 1989), parallel (Chadaigne, 2002), community (Fuller, 2001; Gumucio-Dagrón, 2001a; Van Oeyen, 2003), underground (Lewis, 2000), popular (Van Oeyen, 2003), libres (Cazenave, 1984), dissident (Streitmatter, 2001), resistant (Switzer & Adhikari, 2000) pirate ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirate\\_radio](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirate_radio)"[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirate\\_radio](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirate_radio)), clandestine (Soley & Nichols, 1987), autonomous (Langlois & Dubois, 2005), young (David, 2003), and micro-médias (Rio Donoso, 1996).
  6. See the growing literature of Atton (2002), Couldry and Curran (2003), Downing (2003), Halleck (2002), Herndon (2003), Kidd (2003a, 2003b, 2004), Uzelman (2002), Waltz (2005).

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